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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000444

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TAGS: PGOV PNAT I2

SUBJECT: GOVERNMENT FORMATION UPDATE: KURDISH MINISTER  
SAYS DON'T ASSUME PM FIGHT IS OVER

Classified By: Pol Couns Robert Ford, reason 1.4 (d)

I1. (C) SUMMARY On February 13, the day after the Shia Islamist Coalition (List 555) decision on PM nomination, Minister of Planning and Development Cooperation Barham Salih cautioned poloffs against assuming that Jafari now has a lock on the premiership. Salih said he would push for Thamir Ghadban to be returned to his former position as Minister of Oil. SCIRI representatives described to us the point system for government seat allocations, claiming that Fadhila leader al-Jabiri is fighting with members of his own party over how whether to use Fadhila "points" for three ministries or a single, high-level position within the government for himself. Council of Ministers SYG Emad Dchia told poloffs that Jafari has started reorganizing his immediate staff at the prime ministry. Jafari had made no specific promises to other Shia Coalition members to beat rival Abd al-Mahdi. Dchia said the Sadrist mainly want money as they ponder ministerial slots. National Iraqi List member Husayn al-Sha'lan and Shia Coalition Independent Sami al-Askari told poloffs that action to establish a southern region should be deferred.  
END SUMMARY.

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BARHAM: DON'T ASSUME ITS JAFARI  
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I2. (C) Minister of Planning and Development Cooperation Barham Salih told Poloffs February 13 that Jafari was not a shoe-in for PM. Salih predicted that PM Jafari would be presented by the Kurds and others (presumably the Sunni Arabs and Allawi) with a three-part package of a government program, a set of ground-rules for governmental mechanics, and a list of specific positions sought. He thought that Jafari would be forced to take this back to Muqtada al-Sadr, and that, after a couple of weeks, if Jafari accepted, the result would be promising; if Jafari refused, he would not be able to form a government. (Salih showed no regret about the latter prospect.) He was extremely concerned about Iraq's financial situation, and blamed DPM Ahmad Chalabi for failing to improve Iraq's oil production. He said he was contemplating asking at the Council of Ministers meeting on February 14 for PM Jafari immediately to re-appoint former Minister of Oil Thamir Ghadban. Salih, who was once supposed to be Jalal Talabani's nominee for Minister of Oil, said he was not interested in the job now, and that Ghadban was the man Iraq needed in this important, sensitive job. (Comment: Chalabi in our view has proven decisive at critical moments on infrastructure security issues. Bureaucratic follow-up inside the Iraqi government has been mediocre. End Comment.)

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Jabiri vs. Fadhila Members on Government Positions?  
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¶3. (C) In a separate February 13 meeting, SCIRI Chief of Staff Haitham al-Husseini and party member Jawad Taki al-Ismail described to Poloffs the anticipated point system for distributing government positions. Reportedly, the premiership will be valued at 15 points (with points reflecting seats held by each party). While Husseini and Taki did not provide points for lesser positions, they indicated they would be ranked in the following descending order: deputy prime ministers, deputy presidents, sovereign ministers (e.g., finance, oil, interior, defense, and foreign affairs), and ordinary ministers.

¶4. (C) The SCIRI representatives said that the Fadhila membership wants the party to get three ministries in the new government, and would likely have enough for one sovereign and two other ministries. Taki said that there is a brewing conflict within the Fadhila party because Nadim al-Jabiri wants to use the points to attain the highest position for himself as opposed to three ministries for his party.

¶5. (C) Taki told Poloffs that SCIRI leader Abdul Aziz al-Hakim is in favor of a unity government but advised that Ayad Allawi needs to reach out to the Sadrists to help with this process. When asked if SCIRI was helping to facilitate meetings between Allawi and the Sadrists, al-Husseini snickered and said that Allawi has left this task to Talabani.

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JAFARI AIDE CLAIMS PM MADE NO SPECIFIC PROMISES  
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¶6. (C) Council of Ministers Secretary-General Emad Dchia al-Khirsan (formerly head of the CPA Iraqi Reconstruction and Development Council) told Poloffs that PM Jafari had made "no specific promises" to get votes to win the Shia nomination for PM, but he had made a number of general commitments. Indirectly referring to the Sadrists, he said, "They want to make money." Dchia said he had asked, and had received, PM Jafari's blessing to sit on DPM Ahmad Chalabi's contracts committee. He said that PM Jafari was reorganizing his office to give more authority to technocrats. Dchia said Adnan Ali al-Kadhimi was coming back to be PM Jafari's Chief of Staff. Dchia hoped that former political allies like 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Tamimi would be moved out of powerful roles. He asked for specific help in bringing Iraqi-American technocrats into the Council of Ministries secretariat (septel).

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Sha'lan and Askari Agree on Southern Region  
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¶7. (C) Shaykh Husayn 'Ali al-Sha'lan, National Iraqi List's only Council of Representatives member from Qadisiyah (Diwaniyah) ran into Sami al-Askari, Shia Islamist Coalition independent and one of the bridges between Sadr and Da'wa, in the Convention Center in the presence of Poloffs. Sha'lan and Askari talked about their shared interest in preventing any action towards a Shia federal region for at least the next 2-4 years. Sha'lan told Poloffs afterwards he believes in federalism, but thinks any southern region should be deferred 2-4 years because such a region would need people who are efficient and more capable than many of the people running the provincial governments. He said Askari is strongly opposed to federalism of any kind.

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Shabak on Jafari  
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18. (C) Shia Alliance Independent and leading Shabak representative Dr. Hunain al-Qaddo (The number 2 on the List 555 Nineva List) told PolOffs February 13 that both Abd al-Mehdi and Jafari each signed letters before the February 12 PM vote indicating a readiness to resign as PM after one year if his job performance was deemed lacking. Without actually saying who he voted for, al-Qaddo said he was suspicious of Abd al-Mehdi, who would be inclined to be easy on the Kurds with regard to Mosul and Kirkuk. He described PM Jafari as "honest and clean," but his advisors as "not so good" and possibly corrupt. He characterized the independent bloc within the Shia Coalition as fragile and divided, adding that Hussein al-Shahristani does not have the leadership qualities to lead them (in order for the bloc to be more forceful and demanding).

19. (C) He suspected that government formation negotiations would take at least two months. He said that most Shia reject Ayad Allawi's participation in the government because he does not represent any community in Iraq besides the Ba'athists. He stated that Shia blame Allawi for the security failures and that Ba'athists should be brought into the political process slowly. He said federalism should be applied fairly - to all Iraqis and not just a privilege for one part of Iraq (i.e., Kurdistan).

KHALILZAD